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SENSITIVE

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J.FRAZER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH BROKERS OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION

REF: A. HARARE 1794

[B](#). HARARE 1711

[C](#). HARARE 1599

[D](#). HARARE 1130

[1](#). (SBU) Summary. Disparaging remarks about "talk about talks" between the ruling Zanu-PF party and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) have replaced hopeful reports of imminent breakthroughs. A meeting on November 19, 2003, between Ambassador Sullivan, Director of USAID Paul Weisenfeld, and bishops Trevor Manhanga and Patrick Mutume indicated that the efforts of the religious community to bring the two divided political parties together (reftels) continue -- even if at an extremely slow pace. End summary.

Attempts to Mediate Ongoing

[2](#). (SBU) The bishops stated that separate talks with each side continue, although the most recent meeting with Zanu-PF chairman John Nkomo took place about three weeks ago. Bishop Manhanga stated that President Mugabe is "cordoned off" from the meetings, and that they must go through Nkomo and Politburo secretary for information and publicity Nathan Shamuyarira. Shamuyarira recently called to urge patience on the bishops, and indicated that nothing substantial can be done before the upcoming party congress in December. Both bishops believed that this is another in a long series of delaying tactics, and that the only party that can benefit from such delays is Zanu-PF.

Remaining Issues Preventing Engagement

[3](#). (SBU) The bishops reported that the two parties are in agreement on many of the substantive issues, and that there remain only two contested issues: political legitimacy and an MDC call for lifting sanctions. The bishops stated that Zanu-PF is demanding that the MDC publicly request Western and donor nations to lift all sanctions, although it is unclear from the party rhetoric whether the severe reduction of foreign direct investment, failure to qualify for AGOA, and withdrawal of World Bank/IMF support are considered to be formal "sanctions." Any suggestion of a Zanu/Zapu-type "unity accord" has been abandoned, and the parties reportedly realized (despite the delaying tactics) that negotiation towards a transition, and a level playing field for both parties, was the only way forward.

Public US Statement Regarding "Sanctions"?

[4](#). (SBU) When the Ambassador asked if a public statement clarifying US sanctions would help dispel any notions that the MDC was in control of such sanctions, the bishops responded positively. They opined that Zanu-PF wants to believe that the MDC can simply make a public request, after which Western countries would comply and withdraw the sanctions. The Ambassador reiterated that the sanctions are the result of the flawed presidential elections, ongoing human rights concerns, and US policy as reflected in the Zimbabwe Democracy and Recovery Act (ZDERA), rather than any desire or request by the opposition.

Meetings with Regional Leaders...

[5](#). (SBU) The bishops recently returned from Malawi, where they met with President Muluzi. They reported that Muluzi was very outspoken regarding his belief that Mugabe must retire, and that Muluzi claimed to have made these frank statements directly to Mugabe in private meetings. Bishop Manhanga pointed out that Muluzi's statement regarding his own retirement had effectively canceled out a simmering succession battle inside Malawi, which gained Muluzi a great deal of credibility. With Muluzi's help, the bishops have also scheduled a meeting with Mozambique's President Chissano on November 28, and have scheduled a potential meeting with

Tanzania's President Mkapa, although he is currently in Europe with health problems. Both bishops believed that increased pressure from regional leaders was crucial in moving the country out of crisis.

... But Failure to Secure Meeting with Mbeki

16. (SBU) Despite numerous attempts, the bishops were unable to meet with South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, although they did meet with his spokesman Bheki Khumalo. Given Mbeki's public commitment to "quiet diplomacy," there would undoubtedly be repercussions if he were seen meeting with the bishops. However, since "quiet diplomacy" had not earned any progress in addressing the multiple crises, the bishops hoped that Mbeki could be urged to take the next step and increase the pressure by meeting with the bishops.

Need for a Regional "Champion"

17. (SBU) Both bishops agreed that a strong regional spokesperson should be identified to intercede with Mugabe. Although Obasanjo has the stature to take on the role, his continued participation is questionable for several reasons. First, he has never publicly stated any conviction that Mugabe must leave. Rather, in his role as a member of the Commonwealth troika, he has made numerous apologies on behalf of the regime and interceded to increase inclusion rather than isolation. Second, his current high profile is the result of Nigeria's role as host of the CHOGM meeting. Once this meeting has taken place, Obasanjo would have little incentive to intercede, since there would be less direct benefit. Third, Nigeria is perceived as "outside" of the Southern African region, and West African intervention might be less effective than the intervention of Zimbabwe's closest neighbors. When Mandela was mentioned, Bishop Manhanga stated that the personal rivalry between Mugabe and Mandela would permeate and dilute the message. However, he agreed that Mandela could be useful in encouraging Mbeki to take a more activist position. Mbeki's participation could signal a strong regional demand for an end to the crisis, while Mandela's participation could shield Mbeki from any potential fallout within his own party.

18. (SBU) In the same vein, the bishops suggested Secretary-General Kofi Annan as an alternative "champion."

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Although there are clear limits on what the UN can impose on Zimbabwe from the outside, Annan has publicly articulated his concern about the deteriorating situation. As a Ghanaian as well as a prominent politician, he might be a person of suitable stature to serve as a personal advocate for increased engagement by Zanu-PF.

Implications of the New, Military Governor in Manicaland

19. (SBU) When asked whether the appointment of a Zanu-PF military stalwart might be a deliberate attempt to isolate and counter the political ambitions of Simba Makoni, the bishops responded that Manicaland had never followed the Zanu-PF line nor voted for the Zanu-PF program, when given the choice. In fact, most of the opposition to Zanu-PF (with the exception of the Ndebele-based Zapu) originated in Manicaland. In the recent elections, both the mayor and 17 of 18 council seats were MDC winners. The 18th seat, won by the Zanu-PF candidate, was taken by a victory margin of only two votes.

Comment

10. (SBU) This meeting underscores the current political reality in Zimbabwe: considerable behind-the-scenes maneuvering with no meaningful accomplishments to show for it -- at least from the perspective of the bishops or the opposition. Within the ruling party, vocal hard-liner opposition to the talks and rank-and-file ambivalence seem likely to sustain this status quo well into the new year. The bishops remain nonetheless positive and engaged. As with many others committed to change in Zimbabwe, these two bishops realize that engagement and negotiation are necessary for resolution. However, nobody has yet identified the appropriate leverage -- stick or carrot -- necessary to move the intransigent ruling party towards the negotiating table. At this point, delay not only complicates the eventual resolution, but it also deepens the social and economic morass from which Zimbabwe must emerge if it is to recreate a stable and prosperous state. End comment.

SULLIVAN